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District Attorney Expands Capacity to Investigate Claims of Innocence and Wrongful Conviction with New Hires

Austin, TX – Today, the Travis County District Attorney’s Office announced that it has hired three new individuals to join the office’s Conviction Integrity Unit, which investigates prior convictions to ensure that no innocent person convicted in the county remains in prison. The new hires include two attorneys and an investigator who will be charged with investigating claims of innocence and wrongful conviction. One of the first priorities for the team will be designing an intake process so that families and people incarcerated may request to have a case reviewed.

In keeping with national best practices, the attorneys joining the unit – Saran Crayton and Colin Bellair – are both former public defenders skilled in forensics, and the investigator – Jenna Fechner – is a former defense investigator.

The Travis County Conviction Integrity Unit will be reviewing convictions that stemmed from the closure of the APD DNA Lab along with claims of innocence by people in prison and their families. [According to the Innocence Project](#), a national group working to free the wrongfully convicted, factors leading to wrongful convictions include eyewitness misidentification, improper use of forensics, false confessions, and the use of informants. Other causes include government misconduct and bad lawyering.

According to the [Texas Innocence Project](#), more than 5,600 people in Texas currently in prison are wrongfully convicted or about 4% of the prison population, based on a conservative estimate.

“There is no question in my mind that there are countless valid claims of innocence in the Texas criminal justice system and throughout the country,” said José Garza, Travis County District Attorney. “We have a duty to aggressively seek out and pursue innocence and ensure that no person who is innocent or entitled to a new trial due to a wrongful conviction is forgotten in prison.”

Conviction integrity units have grown in prominence nationally, leading to exonerations throughout the country. For example, under Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner’s tenure, 18 people have been exonerated.

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